

Concerns over balancing the books at the City Chambers

Officers have raised concerns over whether The City of Edinburgh Council will be able to set a balanced budget for the year ahead.

The council is legally required to balance the books and ensure spending commitments do not exceed the local authority's revenue.

The annual budget meeting next month will see political groups scrutinise financial plans drawn up by officials and put forward their own proposals, which councillors will have the final vote on.

This year an £80 million gap in the budget will need to be closed – which is likely to force difficult choices and cuts to public services.

However, questions over preparations for the fast-approaching 23 February meeting were raised at the council's scrutiny committee on Tuesday as a report revealed the risk to 'financial and budget management' was rated as 'red', meaning high.

SNP councillor Marco Biagi said he was "quite shocked" at the rating.

"Are we going to have a balanced budget this year?" he asked.

"I look at a report that has a red risk 29 days out from the meeting.

“Is it the case that proposals have been drawn up by officers at this point but haven’t been shared yet with any of the political groups?”

Richard Carr, interim executive director of corporate services at Edinburgh Council, told the committee there was a “clear path to setting a balanced budget” but said officers were still “a little short of the total quantum of savings required”.

He added: “Obviously, it’s subject to member consideration on some of the proposals that are coming forward.”

Mr Carr said officials had “reached out to political groups”

He added: “The final set of proposals will be published shortly and as I indicated we would be more than happy to meet with groups to go through those final set of proposals.

“The best advice I can give is to reach out to the officer support that is available to help any groups that are developing proposals so we can arrive at something which, irrespective of whether or not it’s something a particular officer might advocate, is nevertheless presented in a way which enables members to make the legitimate decisions they should do as part of the budget proposals.”

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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